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AUTHOR Wong, Lily Y. S.
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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies distracting factors which take away pupils' attention from the lesson and focus it on the teacher. Distracting factors include teachers' irritating habits, improper attire, and mannerisms. Examples of distracting features of both males and females are listed in eight categories: (1) attire; (2) hair; (3) make-up; (4) personal appearance; (5) jewelry or accessories; (6) glasses; (7) habits and mannerisms; and (8) verbal habits. (JD)

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A SOURCE OF DISTRACTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM: THE TEACHER

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Lily Y. S. Wong

Institute of Education
Singapore

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Studies on characteristics of good teachers and qualities of effective teachers are plentiful. Strategies of good teaching were studied again and over again. Although poor teaching or ineffective teachers have been included in passing, less have been mentioned about the teacher as a source of distraction in the learning process.

It would be unethical and immoral to encourage pupils to verbalize the shortcomings of their teachers, and if the pupils are too young, they may not even understanding concepts of effective and ineffective teaching. As a result of this, only good qualities of teachers are gathered.

In my contacts with trainees, both in the Cert Ed and Dip Ed programme, I try to convey to them the multifarious roles of teachers and how these roles can be played effectively. I also want to alert them of the possibility of the unexpected and sometimes adversive effects arising probably from the well-meant intentions of teachers. One aspect of this possibility is that the teacher can be a source of distraction to pupils.

Teachers may be knowledgeable, well planned, and enthusiastic about teaching, but if they are insensitive to their being a likely source of distraction in the learning process, they can undermine all the zeal and preparation for successful teaching. This paper summarizes the data gathered from more than 100 IE trainees who listed the distracting features of their teachers in retrospect. Most of the trainees were participants of the elective course entitled "The Teacher's Roles" and others were tutees in the foundation

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course. The trainees were asked to recall their learning experience as pupils in schools when their attention was on the individual teachers instead of on the learning task. Their experience and observation offer a guide to teachers who want to reflect and self-evaluate to perfect themselves as the model and faciliator of learning. The purpose of this paper is to offer thoughts for consideration and it is not meant to search for frequecies of the most common distractions.

Although it seems reasonable to suggest the removal of the object that causes distraction in order to enhance concentration in the learning task, we cannot remove those teachers even if they are the cause of pupils' inattentiveness in the classroom. As such, teachers should check and reflect if they are causing distractions, and if so, should try to reduce or eliminate the source of distractions arising from themselves. With conscious efforts, and as believers of change, the teachers can modify themselves to become effective facilitators of learning, and as models on the pedestal where teachers are.

Teacher distracting factors are the aspects of the teacher which take away or minimise attention of the pupils from the lesson and focus it on the teacher. Teacher distracting factors include some of their irritating habits, improper attire and mannerisms which may amuse the pupils. An amusing factor can become distracting if it continues. For easy reference, the examples of distracting features of the individual teachers are listed into eight categories. Letters in brackets indicate whether such an example applies to male (M) or female (F) teachers or to both (M & F) gender.

Attire:

squeaky shoes (M & F)
body-hugging clothes (M & F)
zips not completely done (M & F)
too many unbuttoned buttons (M & F)
flashy colour clothes (M & F)
flimsy clothes (M & F)
dusty shoes (M & F)
worn-out shoes (M & F)
heels too high (M & F)
wearing slippers (M & F)

plunging neckline (F)
fanciful stockings (F)
dropping off bra-straps (F)
very short skirts (F)

high slits (F)
cut-in armholes (F)
petticoats which show (F)

wearing no socks (M)
bulging pockets (M)
dangling cuffs of long sleeves (M)

shirts not properly tucked (M)
infrequent change of pants (M)
pants too short (M)

Hair:

hair that keeps falling over face (M & F)
hair covering the eye/eyes (M & F)
dandruff (M & F)

constant flicking of hair (M & F)
unkempt hair (M & F)
dirty and oily hair (M & F)

daily change of hairstyle (F)

fanciful hair-do (Afro style) (F)

Make-up:

strong perfume or lotion (M & F)

strong natural odour (M & F)

glossy lipsticks (F)
heavy eye shadow (F)
fluttering eye-lids/lashes (F)

nails too red (F)
excessive make-up (F)

Personal Appearance

finger nails trimmed with dirt (M & F)
dirty toe nails (M & F)

long finger nail(s) (M & F)
sleepy eyes (M & F)

unshaven face (M)

Jewelry or Accessaries

long and swinging chains (M & F)
too many unnecessary rings (M & F)

chunky necklaces (M & F)
huge rings (M & F)

big and unusual ear-rings (F)
constant change of jewelry (F)

noisy bangles (F)

noisy keys and chain (M)

big cowboy belts (M)

Glasses

dark tinted glasses which hide the eyes (M & F)
dropping spectacles (M & F)
glasses of extraordinary shape and size (M & F)

Habit and Mannerisms

frequent scratching of head (M & F)
constant rubbing of nose (M & F)
clearing throat frequently (M & F)
biting and licking lips constantly (M & F)
fondling watch or chain (M & F)
breaking chalk unnecessarily (M & F)
playing with keys, coins or chalk (M & F)
yawning without covering mouth (M & F)
sneezing without covering mouth (M & F)
walking around while talking to the class (M & F)
walking to and fro non-stop while teaching (M & F)

playing with hair (M & F)
sitting on table (M & F)
removing shoes (M & F)
picking nose (M & F)
breaking knuckles (M & F)
shaking legs while sitting (M & F)
doodling on board (M & F)
jerking of shoulders (M & F)

sitting on the teacher's desk with legs crossed or wide open (F)

pulling up trousers (M)

Verbal Habits: Besides mispronouncing words and making grammatical errors, the excessive use of the following by both male and female teachers is annoying--

okay
right
hmm...
alright
you see
understand
you know

Most of the above do not pose serious problems to learning. With

determined effort and self-awareness, teachers can minimize the source of distraction arising unintentionally and unconsciously from themselves, and maximize attention of the pupils on the learning task. One way of checking on the above is to ask for a third person's opinion. An experienced teacher who is well respected by most pupils and colleagues will tell you if you ask.